

BIBLICAL EXERCISES FOR SPIRITUAL HEALTH & FITNESS IN 2014 SERIES

**The Discipline of Disciple-Making:
“ Christ: The Center of a Disciple’s Life”**

Matthew 28:18-20

Each of us here today became Christ's disciple the moment of our salvation. Disciples are Christ's sheep, who hear His voice, and follow Him. Followers are disciples, disciples are believers, and believers are Christians, and Christians have been born again at the moment they were saved. So we gather as God’s family, saved by grace, through faith, the moment we called upon the Name of the Lord.

Communion¹ is when we gather as Christ's Body, to declare that **Christ is the center** of our lives, and we are His disciples. We celebrate by reaffirming: Christ's death in our place, His burial with our sins, and His resurrection for our endless life, is the heart of our life here on Earth each day.

CHRIST IS TO BE THE CENTER OF HIS DISCIPLE’S LIFE

Christ is the center in the life of those who are saved, who are born-again, and who are believers. That means that for a true disciple of Jesus: Christ is central to everything. We could summarize Christ's message of salvation to the phrase: “It’s no longer I who live, but Christ”. That is why self-centered living is one of the key areas we are to resist all of our days.

Paul distilled the message of salvation down to phrase when he gave his testimony in Galatians 2:20. Paul explains *the result* of salvation is: “not I but Christ”; and *the method* of salvation is: “He gave Himself for me”.

Galatians 2:20 (NKJV) I have been crucified with Christ; **it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me**; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, **who loved me and gave Himself for me.**

JESUS SPOKE OF HIMSELF AS THE SOURCE OF EVERYTHING

Jesus spoke of Himself so often. In Christ's words that fill 1,958 verses of the Gospels we find Him using the first person pronoun 1,473 times in 773 verses. That is a lot. Jesus was saying I want you to listen to Me, and think about My words for you! That is why our self-centeredness is so offensive to God. Life is not about us, but life is about Christ.

¹ Baptism is when we individually affirm that Christ is now the center of our life. Baptism is our declaration that we are now owned by our Triune God: by complete faith in God the Father, complete love for God the Son, and complete hope in God the Spirit. Baptism is the badge of entrance into the Body of those who are followers, believers, and disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today we are going to search the Scriptures to find what it really means that Christ is central to everything. Christ is the only key that unlocks abundant, overflowing, satisfied, and endless life. Jesus simply said that “in Me” is the key to everything we will ever need. In fact if we just took the time to study all of these times Jesus used the first person pronouns, we have almost a summary of the doctrine of the rest of the New Testament.

CHRIST THE AUTHOR OF LIFE

Christ is central because He is the Creator and Sustainer of Life. He is even called the Author of Life in Acts 3:15 (ESV, NIV, NAS). Open with me to John 1:1-4, and follow along as we stand and hear this declaration by God, through His Word, that Christ Jesus is the source, the origination, and only supplier of life. If we have eternal life today, Christ is the Author, and thus central to our life.

John 1:1-4 (NKJV) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. 4 **In Him was life**, and the life was the light of men.

CHRIST IS THE CENTER OF SALVATION

Christ is central to salvation because, salvation is when we receive Him as our Light & Life (1:1-4), and He makes us children of God. John 1:12 (NKJV) But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.

Paul summed up this centrality of Christ to our salvation in Romans 11:36, and then again in Colossians 1:14-18. The key to understanding the New Testament is the amazing unity. What Jesus said, His Apostles said. What Jesus taught, the Epistles only enlarged and unfolded; but there is never any inconsistency with what Christ taught, and what His Apostles wrote. All were teaching and writing the amazingly unified Word of God.

Look at Romans 11:36 (NKJV) with me: “For **of Him and through Him and to Him** are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.” That is just Paul’s reflection of Christ's making it clear that to a disciple, it’s all about Christ! Everything in the universe and in my life centers upon Him.

Now, move onward to Col. 1:14-18 and see even more the centrality Christ is to have in our lives. Colossians 1:14-18 (NKJV) in whom we have **redemption through His blood**, the **forgiveness of sins**. 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created

through Him and **for Him**. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that **in all things He may have the preeminence**.

Jesus is to be the center of our life. Salvation begins us walking through life seeing everything centered upon Christ. Now back to the Gospel by John, where Jesus talks more about Himself than almost all the other three (Synoptic) Gospels combined².

WHAT CHRIST DOES IN THE LIFE OF A DISCIPLE

1. *Christ explains the Father to us.* Jesus Christ is the One who knows, reveals, and explains God the Father to us. John 1:18 (NKJV) No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

2. *Christ brings all of God, immeasurably to us.* God doesn't come in pieces, Christ brings all His fullness to us. John 3:34 (NKJV) For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.

3. *Christ gives us an always Satisfied-life.* John 6:35 (NKJV) And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.

4. *Christ offers us a Spirit-overflowing life.* When we believe in Him, rivers flow from our lives. We are not just given drips, sprays, puddles, stagnant ponds, not He offers us rivers that flow; but we are responsible to clear out any obstacles to His flowing out of us. John 7:38 (NKJV) He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

The Spirit's river of life-giving water flowing from us gets blocked by sins like an unforgiving spirit, resentment, bitterness, pride, dishonesty, sensuality, and uncleanness. If we cling to our pet sins, He is blocked from freely flowing out of us.

5. *Christ becomes to us our Light-filled life.* When we follow Him we never walk again in the darkness. John 8:12 (NKJV) Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

6. *Christ is central to our Sin-purged life.* When we believe in Him He takes all our sins so we won't die with any. John 8:24 (NKJV) Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."

² Of the 1,473 personal pronouns used by Christ, 698 of them are in the Gospel by John. Also, the names of God used in the Gospels are fascinating. In order of occurrence in the NKJV: God is used most at 1,356x (Gospels 320x/1036 Rest); Jesus is second with 981x (623x/358x); then Lord 696x (212x/484x); Christ is next with 571x (60x/511x); fifth is Jesus Christ with 552x (24x/528x); next is Lord Jesus Christ with 341x (0x/341x); then last is Spirit with 247x (51x/196x plus Holy Spirit 192x). The ratio of "Jesus" to "Jesus Christ and Lord Jesus" is significant. Jesus (623x Gospels/358 rest of N.T.) alone is only three times outside of the Gospels. Jesus Christ is only 24x in the Gospels but 528x in the rest. Also God is 320x in the Gospels and 1,036 in the rest.

7. *Christ is the start of our Truth-following life.* When we abide in Christ's Word the Truth, we are His true disciples, and truly liberated for life from the stranglehold or sin's enslaving power. John 8:32 (NKJV) And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

8. *Christ is central to our Abundant-life.* Jesus said he was the door to life, and life more abundant. John 10:9-10 (NKJV) I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

9. *Christ is giver of our Endless-life.* Jesus is the only access to life that shall endless be. John 11:25-26 (NKJV) Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

10. *Christ is crucial to our Father-seeing life.* We can only honor the Father through Christ, and Christ is also the only way to seeing the Father. John 12:25-26, 45 (NKJV) He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor. 45 And he who sees Me sees Him who sent Me.

11. *Christ is key to our Experiencing God-life.* Jesus said that if we love and obey Him, we love the Father, and Christ will open up the Father to us. John 14:21-23 (NKJV) He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and **manifest Myself** to him." 22 Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" 23 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and **My Father will love him**, and **We will come to him** and **make Our home** with him.

12. *Christ is the entrance to our Prayer-powered life.* We are to always ask In Jesus' Name. John 14:13-14 (NKJV) And whatever you **ask in My name**, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you **ask anything in My name**, I will do it. John 15:16 (NKJV) You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever **you ask the Father in My name** He may give you. John 16:23-24, 26 (NKJV) "And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you **ask the Father in My name** He will give you. 24 Until now you have asked nothing **in My name**. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. 26 In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you;

13. *Christ is the start our Spirit-indwelt life.* The Holy Spirit is sent in Christ's Name. John 14:26 (NKJV) But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will **send in My name**, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

14. *Christ is the source of our Love-filled life.* Christ is the source of love. John 15:9-10 (NKJV) “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will **abide in My love**, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and **abide in His love**.”

WHEN CHRIST IS NOT THE CENTER

What does a believer look like, that no longer seeks to keep Christ as their central focus of life?

What would someone who is not spiritually maturing look like? These signs of spiritual immaturity are the symptoms of not being engaged in the walk that identifies a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

From Acts to the end of the New Testament the Scriptures were written to help true disciples of Christ know where it is that need a tune-up, and overhaul, and an alignment to get back onto the Way of following Christ as His disciples. That is the “teaching them to observe” portion of the Great Commission.

The Epistles are the practical daily lessons, or doctrines that we are to personally embrace. Then these “teachings” are what we share from our experience, to help other believers know how they are to follow Christ; and what hinders them from pleasing Him.

We can summarize the key elements that Christ left in the New Testament for believers to “observe”, and explain what any neglect of that would look like for a true disciple. Here is a simple way of showing this analysis. You know you need to be taught how to be Christ-centered:

SYMPTOMS OF THE SELF-FOCUSED: ME BUT NOT CHRIST LIFE

As Christ's followers or disciples we are to seek Him as our goal, purpose, and direction each day. When we don't it is no longer Christ who leads, but us.

If you have: Usually only a marginal desire for God's Word (virtually “Biblically illiterate”).

If you: Often walk in the flesh; and usually do not know the difference between walking in the flesh and walking in the Spirit.

If you have: Few, if any, “works of grace”, i.e., no evidence of being filled with God’s love to serve others, giving, etc.

If you are: Usually stuck in the basics, with no evident growth.

If you have: A limited desire for fellowship with other believers, you can “take it or leave it”.

If you have: strong desires for worldly possessions; and are driven by selfish ambitions; and often exhibiting a spirit of competition.

If you: Often feel great difficulty in repenting/forgiving others.
If you have: A lack of compassion for the lost.
If you are: Not actively assisting in the spiritual development of others.
If you have: A limited sense of God, His character or His will.
If you have: A life filled with fear, anxiety, and the absence of peace.
If you are: Often covetous, boastful, prideful, manipulative, etc.
If you have: Only partial victories over sin.
If you have: A non-existent or lackluster prayer life.
If you have: Little or no time or sincere interest in God-centered worship.
If you are: Not really accountable to anyone for anything.
If you have: A very small degree of grace and mercy toward others or self.³

If any of the above symptoms are in your life today, now is the time to repent. Forsake all areas of selfish living by right here, gathered before Christ:

TODAY WE RENEW OUR PLEDGE: NOT I BUT CHRIST

Make Paul's distilled down purpose in life your very own again today:

I want *the result* of my salvation to always be the goal of: "not I but Christ". He must increase and I want to decrease.

I want to always remember that *the method* of my salvation: "He gave Himself for me". I was bought at a great price and now I belong to Him.

Galatians 2:20 (NKJV) I have been crucified with Christ; **it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me;** and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, **who loved me and gave Himself for me.**

RE-AFFIRM CHRIST AS THE CENTER OF YOUR LIFE

Cry out in faith to Christ and say:

"I want to stay crucified with you oh Christ.
No longer do I want to live for me.
I want to renew my surrendered life of following you".

Communion **is when we all together in the Body**, at the same time, **declare as we eat these symbols** that Christ is the center **of our lives as His disciples.**

We celebrate by reaffirming: Christ's death in our place, His burial with our sins, and His resurrection for our endless life, is the heart of our life here on Earth each day.

³ Adapted from Doug Morrell, Wesley's 3-Strand Discipleship, May 18, 2005; <http://www.corediscipleship.org/index.html>

Christ is always to be the center of life to us who are saved, who are born-again, and who are believers. As true disciples of Jesus: Christ is central to everything.